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MODERN IDEAS OF GOD

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Modern ideas of God are many and various, but all of them, so far as they are not mere reproductions of traditional views handed down from the past, are dominated by one or the other of two independent tendencies, which took their rise respectively from Spinoza and from Kant. In this article it is impossible to follow the various ramifications of these tendencies. They are often found together in the same theologian in curious and even inconsistent combinations. I desire to distinguish them sharply the one from the other, and to study them separately as they appear in a few of their most notable and consistent representatives. The former tendency, as I have said, took its rise from Spinoza. Despised and neglected by the leaders of European thought for nearly a hundred years after his death, he finally came to his rights, and was speedily a dominant force in Germany, which was about to assume again the intellectual leadership of Europe held in the eighteenth century successively by England and France. The time was ripe for Spinoza's philosophy. Reaction against the extreme individualism and superficial rationalism of the period was growing rapidly, and the profound and massive monism of the great Jewish sage was fitted to appeal to the imagination of the new age. The first important utterance was Herder's little work entitled *Gott*, which appeared in 1787 and had wide influence. In this book Herder interprets Spinoza in the light of Leibnitz's dynamic conception of the universe, and so supplements his unity of substance with an all-pervasive unity of force. God he represents as the infinite force which constitutes the essence of all existence, spiritual and material, and individualizes itself in the phenomenal world both of man and of nature. We are differentiations of this one all-embracing force, and have reality as individuals in proportion as we give ourselves to

the preservation of the whole, which we feel belongs to us and to which we belong. Our individuality consists in our consciousness of oneness with the all and our devotion to it. In coming to a knowledge of God, of whom we are a part, we come to self-consciousness, and in coming to self-consciousness we come to a knowledge of God.

Thus, with a monism as thoroughgoing as Spinoza's, Herder is enabled, as he thinks, to make room for individual religious feeling and activity, and so prepares the way for the various combinations of monism and Christian theism which are among the most characteristic features of nineteenth century religious thought.¹

In line with the same general tendency, stress began to be laid toward the close of the eighteenth century, again under the influence of Leibnitz's dynamic philosophy, upon a unity of process controlling all nature and human history, or in other words upon the doctrine of evolution. Herder's elaborate *Ideen zur Philosophie der Geschichte der Menschheit* (1790 f.) is an important document in this connection. The effect of the growing theory of evolution, which rapidly made its way both in philosophy and in science, was identical with that of Herder's interpretation of Spinoza, promoting as it did the idea that all force is immanent rather than extraneous, and so tending to undermine the idea of a transcendent creator and governor of the world, and ultimately to promote the doctrine of divine immanence.

Closely related to Herder's monism, though worked out more carefully and formulated in a more philosophical way, is Schleiermacher's idea of God. He felt, as Herder did, the influence of Spinoza, but not to the same extent the influence of Leibnitz; and he was controlled much more than Herder by the growing romanticism of the age. Two things about romanticism are of particular interest in this connection, its emphasis upon the emotional side of man's nature, and its recognition of him as part of a larger whole, in oneness with which and in openness to whose influence he finds his true life. Culture consists in learning to appreciate the beauty and harmony of the universe of which one

¹ For a fuller description of Herder's book, reference may be made to my article in the *Hibbert Journal* for July, 1905.

is a part, in coming into more intimate sympathy with it, and in acquiring a sensitiveness to the whole world of nature and of man. The common tendency among the romanticists was to reproduce the conditions of earlier ages before the modern spirit of enlightenment had taken possession of the world, when every one believed in immediate intercourse between man and the universe about him, in apparitions and fairies and fables, and when the fancy had free play and was not yet destroyed by the ruthless hand of reason. The effect upon religion was diverse. Some of the romanticists felt the religious impulse strongly; but with their hostility to the dominance of reason, which they believed began with the Reformation, and with their distaste for the prevalent coldness and barrenness of Protestantism, they found Catholicism more to their liking. Others revolted against religion altogether, which they knew only in its rationalistic form, and regarded it as unworthy the notice of the man of genuine culture. It was for romanticists of the latter class that Schleiermacher wrote in 1799 his famous *Reden über die Religion an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern*.² The most important of the discourses is the second, on the nature of religion. The general thesis is that religion has its seat, not in the intellect, nor in the will, but in the feelings, and consists in a sense of the universal or infinite. "Piety," Schleiermacher says, "must take its place alongside of science and practice as a third of equal dignity and importance." To be religious is to be immediately conscious of the universal, that is of the divine, in and through all its manifestations in the world of sense and thought. Schleiermacher's religious sense was simply a translation into other terms of the artistic sense of the romanticists. What they called openness to the universe he called openness to God. What they regarded as an apprehension of its beauty and harmony was to him an apprehension of the divine. So he claimed that the highest culture, of which the romanticists made so much, includes religion; and to be without religion is to content oneself with a partial and one-sided development. Religion raises a man above his individual limitations into converse with the infinite, and the religious man recognizes in every event a manifestation of the divine.

² English translation by John Oman, "On Religion," etc., 1893.

Everything is a miracle, a sign of the presence and activity of God. Revelation is every communication of the universe to the human spirit, every vision which the individual has of the All. Grace is merely the efficient influence of man's consciousness of the infinite upon his own living. Ego and non-ego are simply differentiations of the Absolute, or God. In the Absolute the two exist in perfect unity, in the world they are separated. But they become one again in every impression of the world upon us. The universal manifests itself only through the individual, and the individual comes to its true life only in the universal, and to be aware of this life is to be religious. In a later work, *Der Christliche Glaube*, Schleiermacher defines religion as the sense of dependence upon the infinite. But this was due to the growing sway of traditional theology, and indicates no essential change of view.

Under the influence of Kant's epistemology, Schleiermacher says that we become conscious of our oneness with the absolute, not through immediate vision of it, but only through our relation to the phenomenal universe, and as a result of the impression of the world upon us. And, equally under Kant's influence, he denies that we apprehend the absolute intellectually. All knowledge of it is impossible; it is given us only in feeling. He thus saves himself from mysticism in the historic Neoplatonic sense. But this does not affect the controlling tendency of his thought. He belongs in the group which owed its existence to Spinoza. He is a monist as truly as Herder, who was not at all in sympathy with the new critical epistemology and rejected it completely.

Closely related to both Herder and Schleiermacher is Hegel with his logical monism. In his *Lectures on the Philosophy of Religion* (published posthumously in 1832) he says, "God is the unity of the natural and spiritual."³ "God is the absolute substance, the only true reality. Everything else which is real is not real in itself; it has no existence in itself. The only absolute reality is God alone, and so he is the absolute substance."⁴ The absolute, to be sure, is dynamic, not static as with Spinoza. "Only God is; God, however, only through the mediation of himself

³ *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, 2d ed., Berlin, 1840, I, 202.

⁴ *Ibid.* I, 90.

with himself. He wills the finite, he sets it before himself as another, and thereby is made another to himself, is made a finite, for he has another over against himself." "This existence of the finite must not continue, but must be put an end to. God is the movement toward finiteness, and also the removing of it in himself. In the ego, as that which exists finitely, God returns to himself, and is only God in that he thus returns. Without the world God is not God."⁵ In the dynamic character of the absolute is found the basis of Hegel's doctrine of evolution, which is one of the secrets of the influence of Hegelianism.

"Religion," Hegel says, "is knowledge of God, which, since we are but moments in the self-expression of God, may be called also God's self-knowledge." "Religion is the knowledge which the finite spirit has of the infinite, and it is the knowledge which the divine spirit has of itself through the medium of the finite, and so religion may be called God's self-consciousness."⁶

The difference between Hegel and Schleiermacher, in spite of their hostility to each other, is for our purpose not vital. It is true that Schleiermacher approaches the absolute from the side of the finite, while Hegel proceeds in the opposite direction, so that the one is experimental where the other is speculative; but God is as truly absolute being, and spirit and nature as truly differentiations of the absolute, to the one as to the other. Moreover, it is of minor consequence that the one lays the emphasis on feeling and the other on knowledge. Indeed, Hegel himself recognizes feeling as the primary organ of religion, but he puts content into it, which he thinks is lacking in Schleiermacher's view. "Feeling," he says, "may have the most various content." "Feeling is the form in which the content is entirely accidental." To put content into religious feeling is the work of philosophy, but "philosophy is distinguished from religion only in form, not in content." "Philosophy thinks what the person as such feels, . . . and so feeling is not repudiated by philosophy, but is given its true content by it."⁷

The characteristic thing about Hegel, as well as Herder and Schleiermacher, is the notion of God as the absolute, of which

⁵ *Vorlesungen über die Philosophie der Religion*, I, 193.

⁶ *Ibid.*, I, 202.

⁷ *Ibid.*, I, 126.

spirit and nature are only differentiations or manifestations—a thoroughgoing monism, in which oneness is the controlling fact. God so conceived may be given a moral character; both Schleiermacher and Hegel emphasize the fact that he is love. But this is not of the essence of the matter in either case, and for our immediate purpose is not important. The one essential thing about the general type of theism I have been describing is that God is the all-embracing whole, in the consciousness of his unity with which man finds his highest life.

The tendency represented by these men makes its influence felt everywhere. It is in line with the nineteenth century spirit of collectivism; and in spite of ethical difficulties and stubborn facts of experience, it makes a tremendous appeal to thoughtful minds. Many may not go as far as the thinkers described; the tendency may not always express itself in the form of a thoroughgoing and consistent monism; but the emphasis upon divine immanence in contrast with the common eighteenth century emphasis upon divine transcendence, the insistence that God is in the universe of nature and man, and that it is essentially one with him—this is characteristic of most modern religious thought. Today God is not sought in strange and abnormal phenomena, in so-called miraculous events, as he once was, but in the common and orderly processes of nature. The whole world is permeated by the divine, and man himself is one with God. Not by shutting our eyes to the universe in which we live, and not by denying the attributes of humanity, do we form a just conception of God, as was once believed; but to be in closest touch with nature is to be in closest touch with God, and to be most human is to be most divine. The doctrine of divine immanence has been called the characteristic religious doctrine of the nineteenth century, and certainly none has had wider acceptance among men of modern sympathies. Vague and inconsistent as the belief commonly is; thoroughly monistic, or shrinking from monism in its fear of pantheism; ready to repudiate the personality of God, as Herder was, or jealously insistent upon it, as most theists are—whatever form it takes, the tendency I have been describing is widely dominant today, and it is in the philosophy of Spinoza that it has its roots.

The other general tendency to which I have referred took its rise with Kant. He was at one with the rationalists of the eighteenth century in regarding morality as the essence of religion. In his work on Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason he is very emphatic on this point. Subjectively considered, religion is the recognition of our duties as commands of God. When we do our duty, we are virtuous; when we recognize it as commanded by God, we are religious. The notion that there is anything one can do to please God except to live rightly is superstition. Moreover, to think that we can distinguish works of grace from works of nature, or that we can detect the activity of heavenly influences, is superstition. All such supernaturalism lies beyond our ken. There are three common forms of superstition, all promoted by positive religion: the belief in miracles, the belief in mysteries, and the belief in means of grace.

The genuine rationalism of all this is evident. But Kant's religious contribution does not lie here. This is simply the reproduction of the common thought of the eighteenth century. Nor does it lie, as is frequently said, in his vindication of moral freedom; for freedom was not generally denied by the rationalists of the eighteenth century, and Kant's vigorous assertion of it was made necessary only by his own critical philosophy, which seemed to destroy it altogether. His real religious contribution was a double one. In the first place, he took God out of the physical and put him into the moral sphere. In his theology as well as in his epistemology he felt the influence of Hume, but in the one as in the other he went beyond Hume's negations to a positive reconstruction of his own. We do not reach God by arguing back from the universe to a first cause, from the multiplicity of phenomena to a principle of unity, from contingent to necessary being. The iron chain of cause and effect which binds our phenomenal universe together knows no God and has no place for God. God is not a phenomenon, a being presented to us. God is an idea, a belief, which gives meaning to our ethical life and so is a postulate of our moral will.

In the second place, Kant's religious contribution lies in the fact that he interpreted God, thus transferred to the moral sphere, in terms of purpose. The necessity which leads me to postulate

God is not that I must account for the origin of my moral nature and so need a moral creator; nor that I must have a moral law-giver, or standard, or motive, as the rationalists in general said. The law of my practical reason, the categorical imperative, demands that I shall labor for the accomplishment of the highest good, shall bring my life under the control of this as a dominating purpose; and God is the purposeful being whom I assume in order to make the highest good realizable and so rational. God is thus read in terms of purpose. He exists, so far as I am concerned, simply in order to the realization—which means the rationalization—of the highest good, the Kingdom of God. We do not get God from the universe, we give him to the universe. We read meaning, worth, moral purpose, into it. We assume God, not to account for the world, but in order to realize the highest good; and we live as moral beings by the support of the meaning and worth thus attaching to the world. In his *Critique of the Practical Reason* Kant says, “Granted that the pure moral law absolutely binds everyone, not as a prudential rule but as a command, then the right-minded man may well say: I will that there be a God; that my existence in this world be also an existence outside the chain of nature, in a pure world of the understanding; finally, that my existence be endless. I insist on this, and will not permit this belief to be taken from me.”⁸ In another work he says, “Out of the moral law which our own reason prescribes to us with authority, and not out of the theory of the nature of things in themselves, does the conception of God arise which the practical pure reason compels us ourselves to make.”⁹ Again, “Theoretically we do not, by the strongest efforts of reason, come at all nearer to the conviction of the existence of God, the reality of the highest good, and the prospect of a future life; for we possess no insight into the nature of supersensuous objects. Practically, however, we make these objects for ourselves as we regard the idea of them helpful to our reason’s ultimate aim,” etc.¹⁰ God, the Kingdom of God, and immortality are “ideas made by ourselves with a practical purpose, which must not be given theoretical value, or they will turn theology into

⁸ Hartenstein’s edition of Kant’s Works, IV, 267.

⁹ Von einen neuerdings vornehmen Ton in der Philosophie, I, 188.

¹⁰ Ueber die Fortschritte der Metaphysik seit Leibnitz und Wolff, III, 463.

theosophy, moral teleology into mysticism, and psychology into pneumatology, and so put things a knowledge of which we make use of in practical matters over into a transcendent sphere where they are entirely inaccessible to our reason."¹¹

We are evidently moving here in a realm of thoroughgoing pragmatism. If one says we have no evidence for the existence of God, no proof of divine purpose in the world, we may say in the spirit of Kant: We will put purpose there; we will give the world meaning which we cannot discover in it. This is to be religious. Faith in God is an heroic deed, not simply a passive acquiescence. We make a moral purpose supreme, and we read this moral purpose into the universe, and thus we find God for ourselves. Religion is a creative act of the moral will, as knowledge, according to Kant, is a creative act of the understanding. Only as we stamp purpose on the world and give it ethical meaning can we live our highest life and be true to ourselves. This is Kant's great religious message.

The validity of the particular way in which he reaches God as a postulate of the moral will may be seriously questioned. He says of it himself that, quite independently of the presuppositions of God, freedom, and immortality, one's duty grounds itself on the moral law, and needs no support from theories touching the inner nature of things, or the secret purpose of the world order, or the reality of a world ruler.¹² His method of reaching God is familiar. We see inevitably by the law of our practical reason that virtue should lead to happiness. The combination of virtue and happiness we recognize as the highest good by the very necessity of our nature. But this leads us to postulate God, for only a supreme moral being can make virtue lead to happiness; that is, only such a being can supply the second element of the highest good. This highest good is the Kingdom of God and the supreme end of creation. The moral law requires that I shall make it the aim of all my efforts. My own happiness as a moral being is included in this Kingdom, but must not be the motive of my conduct. My only motive should be virtue. No one is moral who obeys the law for

¹¹ Ueber die Fortschritte der Metaphysik seit Leibnitz und Wolff, III, 476.

¹² Kritik der praktischen Vernunft, IV, 267.

any ulterior purpose. Religion does not supply motive for virtue, but it meets the need of our practical reason, which demands the ultimate realization of the highest good. As I have said, there may be doubt as to the validity of this method of reaching God. As a matter of fact, it has little influence today. It is not here indeed that Kant's contribution lies, but, as already shown, in the fact that he interpreted God wholly in terms of moral purpose.

Closely connected with Kant was Johann Gottlieb Fichte. With Fichte's subjective idealism I am not here concerned; but the conception of religion which appears in some of his earlier writings is important, for it represents a more complete ethicizing of Kant's theory, that is, a more consistent carrying out of Kant's own ethical principles. In his beautiful little essay entitled "Ueber den Grund unseres Glaubens an eine Göttliche Weltregierung," which appeared in the *Philosophisches Journal* for 1798, Fichte shows that we cannot argue from the world to a rational creator or to a world ruler, but can reach God only through our moral nature. I find myself free from the control of the world of sense and raised above it. As a free being, I possess a purpose to which I give myself. I cannot doubt my freedom and I cannot doubt my purpose without denying myself. The conviction that I am free and am called to accomplish a purpose is faith, and hence the element of moral certainty is faith. To set myself an object is the same as to set it before me as actually accomplished in some future time. If I will not deny myself, I must assume the possibility of its accomplishment. If I ought, I can. The ought is given immediately, and necessarily involves the can. This is a categorical imperative, and is based on nothing else. If one says he must know whether he can before he knows whether he ought, he turns the thing around and makes the moral law conditional instead of imperative, and so entirely destroys it. The world, including my existence and that of others, is the common theatre of morality. It constitutes a scene for the exercise of freedom, but itself has not the slightest influence on freedom. The free moral will is above all nature. "That the rational object shall be realized," he says, "can be brought about only through the activity of a free being. But it will surely be realized in accordance with a higher law.

Right doing is possible, and every circumstance contributes to it through that higher law." This moral order, he goes on to say, is divine. "This is the true faith; this moral order is the divine which we assume. It is built through right doing. This is the only possible confession of faith, joyfully and without restraint to do what each one ought to do, without doubting and troubling oneself about the consequences. In this way the divine becomes living and actual to us." And again, "It is therefore a misunderstanding to say that it is doubtful whether there is a God or not. It is not at all doubtful, indeed, it is the most certain thing in the world, the ground of all other certainties, the only absolute objective certainty, that there is a moral order of the world; that every rational individual has his fixed place in this order and his own work; . . . that without it not a hair falls from his head; . . . that every truly good deed succeeds, every bad deed fails infallibly; and that to those who love the good all things work for good. On the other hand, to one who thinks upon this for a moment and acknowledges frankly the result of his thought, it cannot remain doubtful that the conception of God as a special substance is impossible and contradictory."

In his *Appellation an das Publicum gegen die Anklage des Atheismus*, which was published the following year and is simply an elaboration and defense of the briefer essay, he says: "Their object [that is, the object of his opponents] is always enjoyment, whether of a higher or lower sort; enjoyment in this life, and if they picture to themselves immortality, enjoyment in the life beyond the grave. They know nothing else than enjoyment. They cannot conceal from themselves that the success of their striving after enjoyment depends upon something unknown which they call fortune. This fortune they personify, and this is their God. Their God is the giver of all enjoyment, of all happiness and unhappiness to moral beings. This is his fundamental character." "The central point of the strife between me and my opponents is this, that we stand in two different worlds and talk about two different worlds, they about the world of sense, I about the supersensuous world; that they think wholly of enjoyment, whatever form they may give it, while I think wholly of mere duty."

Thus Fichte follows Kant in making God a postulate of the

practical reason. But he is more consistently ethical even than Kant in neglecting altogether the latter's conception of the highest good as the combination of virtue and happiness, and seeing it solely in virtue. To Fichte God is necessary, not, as to Kant, in order to effect the ultimate union of virtue and happiness, but in order to secure the victory of virtue. The good deed succeeds infallibly, the bad deed fails infallibly, because there is a moral order of the universe, or, in other words, because there is a God. And so we may call Fichte's religion ethical optimism. To be virtuous is to do one's duty without regard to consequences. To be religious is to have the faith that goodness will prevail, that there is a moral order of the universe which makes for the final victory of the right. One may be moral and a pessimist. One can be religious only if one is an optimist.

Closely related to the position of Kant and Fichte, and yet fundamentally at variance with it, is the theistic philosophy of Jacobi, who repudiated the monism of Spinoza,¹³ and followed Kant in his sharp distinction between the physical and moral spheres, while at the same time he felt the influence of romanticism, whose emphasis on feeling and on direct vision of things unseen by the common herd dominated his whole system.¹⁴ By the *Verstand*, or Understanding, he affirms, we cannot apprehend God or supersensible realities. We can reach only the phenomenal universe, which is under the control of mechanical law. All philosophy of the understanding, that is, all demonstrative philosophy, of which Spinozism is the most consistent example, is therefore atheistical. We can never discover God or supersensuous reality by means of it. Is there then no God, and are there no spiritual realities, and is there no way by which to reach them? Jacobi answers, Yes; but they are attainable only by another faculty, a faculty of direct vision, which in his earlier works he calls *Glaube*, or Faith, in his later *Vernunft*, or Reason, and which he distinguishes sharply from the understanding. Faith, or Reason, is a perceptive faculty. By it we perceive the supersensible as immediately as sensible objects

¹³ See his Ueber die Lehre des Spinoza, 1785.

¹⁴ See especially his Von den göttlichen Dingen und ihrer Offenbarung, 1811, and the introduction to his philosophical writings prefixed to his treatise on Hume in the collected edition of his Works.

through the senses, and the former no more than the latter needs proof or admits of it. We are reminded here of the Evangelicals, who also assumed the existence of such a faculty, but confined it to the regenerate, making it a gift of the Holy Spirit instead of a natural endowment shared by the whole race. It is this higher spiritual faculty which distinguishes man from the brute, and it is by virtue of belonging to the higher world that he is possessed of freedom and so is a moral being. The immediate consciousness of freedom is fundamental. We are directly aware of our freedom, and so of belonging to a higher world than that of sense and of being able to control and dominate the latter. Jacobi agrees with Kant that a man would not be free, and so not moral, if he were only a part of the phenomenal universe; but he belongs to a higher world, and by virtue of his faith-faculty, of which Kant knows nothing, he becomes aware not only of freedom but also of God and other spiritual realities, becomes a religious as well as a moral being. It is through a knowledge of ourselves that we come to the knowledge of freedom and of God. Nature only conceals God. It is our own souls that reveal him, and we discover him only through self-consciousness. We find God because we can find ourselves only together with him. Revelation is wholly internal. God cannot reveal himself by visible signs and wonders, but only within man's soul. Jacobi thus followed Kant in taking God out of the phenomenal universe and putting him wholly into the moral sphere, but he failed to interpret God as Kant did in terms of purpose, and his notion of the possibility of the immediate vision of supersensible realities is of an altogether different type. His emphasis upon faith, or reason, as a higher faculty than the understanding, giving immediate perception of divine things, is mystical in its tendency, and this sufficiently marks the fundamental contrast between him and Kant, despite the kinship of the two men. As a matter of fact, though Jacobi was radically opposed to the idea of the immanence of God in nature which took its rise from Spinoza's monism, he promoted a modified form of immanence, involving God's presence in humanity, which became very popular in England under the influence of Coleridge, who emphasized Jacobi's distinction between the reason and the understanding, and in America under the influence of Bushnell, who made so much of the

supernatural character of personality. It is, in part at least, due to men of this stamp that the many current combinations of Spinozistic monism and Kantian ethicism have arisen—combinations of varying degrees of clearness and consistency.

Jacobi held an intermediate position, representing exclusively neither of the two tendencies with which we are concerned. But it is unequivocally in the group to which Kant and Fichte belonged that we are to place the most influential theologian of the later nineteenth century, Albrecht Ritschl. Ritschl started as a Hegelian, then broke away and joined the neo-Kantian movement; and his theory of knowledge, which is an important element in his system, is Kantian in origin. We can know only phenomena. We cannot penetrate beneath them to any supposed substratum or *Ding-an-sich*. But this does not mean that in knowing phenomena we do not know reality, for Ritschl adopts the Lotzian modification of the Kantian epistemology, and asserts that in phenomena reality is given, the distinction which Kant draws between phenomenon and noumenon being invalid. The reality of a thing lies in its activities, not in a quiescent something behind them, and when we know it in all its activities we know it through and through. This theory of knowledge Ritschl applies in the religious sphere. In that sphere, too, we can know only phenomena, and we cannot press back either by way of feeling or of knowledge to an unexpressed absolute or infinite. Thus Ritschl repudiates mysticism, for, as he claims, it always involves the assumption of an unseen something back of phenomena to which one can penetrate and into immediate relation with which one can come. That is, he interprets mysticism by its classic Neoplatonic type, in which just this transcendence of phenomena and immediacy of contact with a non-phenomenal noumenon is the essential thing. That he thus interpreted mysticism too narrowly may well be, but this need not concern us here. The point is that such mysticism he repudiated completely, as on his own principle he must.

Similarly, the application of his theory of knowledge to the religious sphere leads him to break away from traditional theology so far as it has to do with supra-phenomenal matters, the being of God, the creation of the universe, the nature of the soul, the future life. All such transcendental subjects, with which theology has so

largely concerned itself, he rules out of religion. We can know nothing about them, and if we could, they would not fall within the religious realm, for religion moves wholly in the sphere of value judgments. No theoretical judgment whatever, whether it concerns God, or the world, or the soul, can have any religious significance. And so no universal objective validity can be claimed for religious truths, and the effort to establish them by demonstration is vain.

Another important element in Ritschl's system is his theory of religion. Religion arises as a result of one's relation to the world. Man is conscious of impulses and aspirations which raise him above the world, and yet he is aware at the same time that he is a part of it, and the great problem in life is to be actually superior to it, to realize his higher ideals, to rule his environment, not be ruled by it. Out of the difficulty which he finds in thus winning the victory religion is born; for he looks without himself for some higher power that shall help him, in other words he looks for a God, that is, not a being who is himself the world, or who is the absolute lying back of it, whose manifestation the world is, or from whom it comes, but a God who stands over against it, asserting a spiritual principle higher than it, so that in oneness with that principle and under the control of the purpose which embodies it one may become superior to the world and a victor over it. Thus he says, "The religious view of the world is in all its forms based upon the fact that man distinguishes himself in some degree in value from the phenomena which surround him and the activities of nature which press upon him."¹⁵ And again: "In all religion the effort is made, with the help of the exalted spiritual power which man worships, to overcome the contradiction in which he finds himself as a part of the world of nature and as a spiritual personality which makes the claim to rule nature. For on the one hand man is a part of nature, helpless over against it, dependent upon and limited by external things. But on the other hand, as spirit, he feels himself driven to assert his independence over against such things. In this situation religion arises as the belief in exalted spiritual powers, through whose help the power which resides in the man himself is in some way supplemented, or raised to a complete whole

¹⁵ *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, III, 17.

of its kind, which is sufficient to withstand the pressure of the natural world."¹⁶

This is, of course, the exact opposite of the idea of God (shared by Herder, Schleiermacher, and Hegel) as the great All, or Absolute, which expresses itself at the same time in nature and in man. It is God over against nature whom Ritschl seeks. He is in consequence often called a dualist, but the name is misleading. He does not think at all in terms of substance, and so is not a dualist in the traditional sense. Our superiority to the world consists in living for ideal aims which do not depend upon it and cannot be destroyed by it, living freely, courageously, patiently, and righteously. To the man living thus the world may become a means for the realization of his higher ends. It is not an end in itself, nor need it be a permanently hostile force which is to be destroyed—Ritschl was not an ascetic. The world is the sphere for the accomplishment of spiritual purposes, and it may be a means thereto or an insurmountable obstacle. In the former case we are victors and free men; in the latter, the world wins the victory over us. Thus in one sense Ritschl may be called a monist, since for the man who is truly a victor over the world all is brought under one control. But this kind of ethical monism is a very different thing from the monism of Spinoza, Herder, Schleiermacher, Hegel, and the rest; and to call it monism at all would give rise to misunderstanding, though perhaps it would be no more misleading than to call Ritschl a dualist. Either is an unfortunate term, for he moves in a different sphere altogether from that in which the words monist and dualist have had their place in the past.

Ritschl's sharp distinction between man and the world reminds us of Jacobi, but it is not the same thing; and the nature of the difference appears clearly in the fact that he repudiates anything like a special spiritual faculty, such as Jacobi assumed, by which we directly perceive spiritual realities. Religion involves no such faculty. It is due to the need in which we find ourselves over against the world, and is simply the assertion of our confidence that we are superior to it and of our conviction that we shall win the victory over it. It is an expression again, as in the case of Fichte, of our ethical optimism.

¹⁶ *Rechtfertigung und Versöhnung*, III, 189.

It is clear that Ritschl reproduced the twofold religious contribution of Kant, who interpreted God wholly in terms of moral purpose. In the fact that he followed Kant in this matter, and reread the entire Christian system in the light of the conception of God as moral purpose, lies his great significance as a Christian theologian. It is true that he did not reach God by the Kantian method, making him a postulate of the practical reason needed to effect the combination of virtue and happiness; he based his theistic faith upon the historic revelation of Jesus Christ. In him we see a man who actually won the victory over the world, which we are striving after, by faith in a God whom he called his Father, a faith which made him absolutely fearless, and by devotion to that Father's will, a will which required unflinching and self-forgetful service of his fellows. The victory won by such faith and devotion—a victory which we too may win—is the strongest possible guarantee of the existence of the divine purpose which we make our own when we thus live. That purpose is the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth; not a combination of virtue and happiness lying beyond our temporal existence, but the reign of righteousness and service in this world of ours. For the promotion of this it is the duty of every man to labor. We win the completest victory over the world, not by asserting ourselves against it, but by promoting the Kingdom of God within it. Devotion to that purpose raises us above the world as nothing else can. We conquer it by serving it. This is Ritschl's combination of ethics and religion, and this, he claims, is the message of Jesus Christ. God is moral purpose, and the purpose of the God whom Christ reveals is the highest we know or can conceive, and so we recognize the supremacy of the Christian God and of the Christian religion. Religion at its best means the winning of a victory over the world by fulfilling the divine purpose in serving the world, and Christianity is religion at its best.

In agreement with Schleiermacher and Hegel, with the rationalists in general, and with Kant, Ritschl interpreted God as love. In this he followed the common tendency of the modern age. But while, according to the rationalistic view, the divine love expressed itself in promoting human happiness; according to Kant in bringing about the co-ordination of virtue and happiness; according to

Schleiermacher in fostering man's consciousness of God; according to Hegel in effecting the reunion of the human and divine; according to Ritschl the fact that God is love means that he gives himself to the establishment of his kingdom interpreted as the reign of love among men—a fellowship of mutual sympathy and helpfulness. The divine love eventuates, not in anything passive, but in active social service. It is interesting to notice in this connection that the old schism between the divine justice and the divine love disappears in Ritschl's theology. The divine justice manifests itself, not in retribution, but in the persistency of God's eternal purpose of love and in the self-consistency with which He realizes that purpose. Ritschl's idea of God was, without doubt, his greatest contribution to Christian thought; and it is clear that it resulted simply from reading into Kant's conception of God as moral purpose a genuinely Christian content.

The two tendencies described in this article are often combined, and there is no reason why they should not be. But it should be noticed that they represent totally different points of view. To the theologian whose interest is solely ethical it makes no difference whether God be thought of as immanent or transcendent. To the one whose interest is metaphysical it makes all the difference in the world. Most Christian theologians have both interests, and combine the two things apparently without realizing the disparate elements involved. It could make only for theological lucidity if the diversity of the two points of view were everywhere recognized, as Ritschl so clearly recognized it, and the need of metaphysical unity were not confounded with the desire for ethical efficiency.